

# Wyandot language

**Wyandot** (sometimes spelled **Wendat**) is the Iroquoian language traditionally spoken by the people known variously as Wyandot or Wyandotte, descended from the Huron Wendat. It was last spoken by members located primarily in Oklahoma, United States and Quebec, Canada. Linguists have traditionally considered Wyandot as a dialect or modern form of Wendat.

Wyandot essentially died out as a spoken language nearly a century ago, though there are now attempts at revitalization. The Wyandotte Nation of Oklahoma is offering Wyandot language classes in the Wyandotte Public Schools, grades K–4, and also at the Wyandotte Nation's preschool "Turtle-Tots" program. The Wendat Community of Quebec is offering adult and children's classes in the Wendat language at its village school in Wendake. The Wyandotte Nation of Oklahoma Language Committee has created online language lessons for self-study.<sup>[3]</sup>

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	Wyandot
	<i>Wa<sup>n</sup>dat</i>
Native to	Canada, United States
Region	northeastern Oklahoma, Quebec; recently near Sandwich, Ontario, and Wyandotte, Oklahoma
Extinct	There was an elderly speaker in 1972. <sup>[1]</sup>
Revival	Oklahoma and Quebec have limited language programs (2007)
Language family	Iroquoian <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Northern<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Lake Iroquoian<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Five Nations<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Huronian<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Wyandot</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul>
Writing system	modified Latin
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	wya
Glottolog	wyan1247 ( <span>http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/wyan1247</span> ) <sup>[2]</sup>

## History

Although it is traditionally equated with or seen as a dialect of the Iroquoian Wendat (Huron), Wyandot became so differentiated as to be considered a distinct language. This change appears to have happened sometime between the mid-eighteenth century, when the Jesuit missionary Pierre Potier (1708–1781) documented the Petun dialect of Wendat in Canada, and the mid-nineteenth century. By the time the ethnographer Marius Barbeau made his transcriptions of the Wyandot language in Wyandotte, Oklahoma, in 1911–1912, it had diverged enough to be considered a separate language.<sup>[4]</sup>

Significant differences between Wendat and Wyandot in diachronic phonology, pronominal prefixes, and lexicon challenge the traditional view that Wyandot is modern Wendat.<sup>[5]</sup> History suggests the roots of this language are complex; the ancestors of the Wyandot were refugees from various Huronian tribes who banded together to form one tribe. After being displaced from their ancestral home in Canada on Georgian Bay, the group traveled south, first to Ohio and later to Kansas and Oklahoma. As many members of this group were Petun, some scholars have suggested that Wyandot is more influenced by Petun than by its descent from Wendat.<sup>[6]</sup>

The work of Marius Barbeau was used by linguist Craig Kopris to reconstruct Wyandot; he developed a grammar and dictionary of the language.<sup>[7]</sup> This work represents the most comprehensive research done on the Wyandot language as spoken in Oklahoma just prior to its extinction (or its "dormancy" as modern tribal members refer to it).

## Phonology

### Consonants

The phonemic inventory of the consonants is written by using the orthography used by Kopris in his analysis, which was based on Barbeau's transcriptions. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbol is written in parentheses afterward whenever it differs from the orthography. Kopris listed places of articulation for the consonants but noted that the distinction had not been made by Barbeau.

	<u>Labial</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>		<u>Post-alveolar</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Nasal</u>	(m)	n					
<u>Plosive</u>		t	d			k	ʔ
<u>Affricate</u>		ts					
<u>Trill</u>		r (ɾ)					
<u>Fricative</u>		s	š (ʃ)	ž (ʒ)			h
<u>Approximant</u>					y (j)	w	

(m) is placed in parentheses because it appears as an allophone of /w/ in nearly all cases, but that cannot always explain its presence. The presence of a single voiced stop, /d/, contrasting with the voiceless stop /t/, makes Wyandot unusual among Iroquoian languages, as it is the only one with a phonemic voicing distinction.<sup>[8]</sup> The /r/ sound is pronounced as [ɾ] rather than [r], according to researchers who phonetically transcribed directly from fluent speakers and described it as "corresponding to the English *r*"<sup>[9]</sup> and as "the smooth English sound, never vibrant."<sup>[10]</sup> The Wyandot /d/ and /n/ are both cognate with /n/ in other Northern Iroquoian languages. Although it could be argued that the two are in free variation, they clearly sometimes contrast, as in the minimal pairs *da* "that; the; who") and *na* ("now; then"). The ambiguity of the relationship between /d/ and /n/ seems to indicate that the two were in the process of a phonemic split that was not yet complete by the early 20th century.<sup>[11]</sup>

Another unique feature of Wyandot is the presence of the voiced fricative /ž/, creating an /š ž/ contrast, but there is no corresponding /s z/ contrast.<sup>[12]</sup> The phoneme /k/ also has no voiced counterpart.

Consonants may appear in clusters. Word-initial consonant clusters can be up to three consonants long, medial clusters up to four consonants long, and final clusters up to two consonants long.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Vowels

Barbeau's original transcriptions contained great detail and a complex system of diacritics, resulting in 64 different vowel characters. By eliminating allophones, Koprís found six phonemes, in addition to the marginal phoneme /ǃ/.

Wyandot vowels

	Front	Back
High	i	u
Mid	ɛ	ɔ
Low	e	a

Other analysis of the same Barbeau data suggests that vowel length is contrastive in Wyandot, like in other Iroquoian languages.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Orthography

Wendat is written with the Latin alphabet. Although based on the 17th-century orthography of the Jesuit missionaries, the current orthography no longer uses the Greek letters θ for [t<sup>h</sup>], χ for [k<sup>h</sup>], ç for [ç], or ʁ for [u] and [w]. Pre-nasalization of stops is indicated by ⟨n⟩ (e.g., ⟨nd⟩). Nasal vowels are indicated as in French by ⟨n⟩ (e.g., ⟨en⟩, ⟨on⟩). To disambiguate nasal vowels from oral vowels followed by /n/, the latter have diaeresis over the vowel (e.g., ⟨ën⟩, ⟨ön⟩). Glottal stops are written with an apostrophe. The fricative /ʃ/ is written as ⟨ch⟩.

Wyandot uses a different orthography from Wendat that explicitly indicates allophones of consonants (e.g. ⟨m⟩, ⟨g⟩). Pre-nasalization of stops is indicated by a raised <sup>n</sup> (e.g., ⟨<sup>n</sup>d⟩, ⟨<sup>n</sup>g⟩). Nasal vowels are indicated by a nasal hook (e.g., ⟨ẽ⟩, ⟨õ⟩). Glottal stops are written with the IPA character ⟨ʔ⟩. The fricatives /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ are indicated with a hachek, as ⟨ṣ̌⟩ and ⟨ẓ̌⟩.

## Sample vocabulary

- *Seten*-Stop, used on road signs (with *arrêt*) in some Huron reserves, such as Wendake in Quebec.
- *Skat*-One
- *Tindee*-Two
- *Shenk*-Three
- *Anduak*-Four
- *Weeish*-Five
- *Sandustee*-Water
- "änen'enh" [a-NEN'-enh] - Mother



A bilingual stop sign in Wendake

## Wyandot and Wendat today

Members of the Wyandotte Nation, whose headquarters is in Wyandotte, Oklahoma, are promoting the study of Wyandot as a second language among its people as part of a cultural revival.<sup>[15]</sup> Since 2005, Richard Zane Smith (Wyandot) has been volunteering and teaching in the Wyandotte schools with the aid of the linguist Koprís.

Linguistic work is also being done on the closely related Wendat. The anthropologist John Steckley was erroneously reported in 2007 as being "the sole speaker" (non-native) of Wendat.<sup>[16]</sup> Several Wendat scholars have master's degrees in Wendat language and have been active as linguists in the Wendat community in Quebec. In Wendake, Quebec, the First Nations people are working on a revival of Wendat language and culture. The language is being introduced in adult classes and into the village primary school. The Wendat linguist Megan Lukaniec has been instrumental in helping to create curriculum, infrastructure, and materials for Wendat language programs.

The Wyandot language is used in the television series Barkskins.

## See also

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- Gabriel Sagard, *Le grand voyage* and *Dictionnaire de la langue huronne* (Dictionary of the Huron Language), 17th century
- John Steckley, ed. (2009). *Dictionary of the Huron Language*
- For an example of Wyandot(te) language revitalization work, see an online lesson: "Wyandotte" (<http://cs.sou.edu/~harveyd/acorns/wyandotte/>), Southern Oklahoma University

## Notes

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2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Huron-Wyandot" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/wyan1247>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. "Wyandotte Language Lessons" (<http://cs.sou.edu/~harveyd/acorns/wyandotte/>). *cs.sou.edu*. Retrieved 2017-10-22.
4. Julian, 2010, p. 324
5. Koprís, 2001, p. 371
6. Steckley, 1988, p. 60
7. Koprís, 2001, p. xxi
8. Koprís, 1999, p. 63
9. Barbeau, 1960, p. 57
10. Haldeman, 1847, p. 269
11. Koprís, 2001, p. 77
12. Koprís, 2001, p. 46
13. Koprís, 2001, p. 57
14. Julian, 2010, p. 326
15. "Language page of the Wyandotte Nation" (<http://www.wyandotte-nation.org/culture/language/>)
16. J. Goddard, "Scholar sole speaker of Huron language" (<https://www.thestar.com/News/Ontario/article/288382>), *Toronto Star*, Dec 24, 2007.

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- [Native-languages.org: Wyandot words \(http://www.native-languages.org/wyandot\\_words.htm\)](http://www.native-languages.org/wyandot_words.htm)
  - [Language page of the Wyandotte Nation \(http://www.wyandotte-nation.org/culture/language/\)](http://www.wyandotte-nation.org/culture/language/)
  - ["Wyandotte Language Lessons" \(http://cs.sou.edu/~harveyd/acorns/wyandotte/\)](http://cs.sou.edu/~harveyd/acorns/wyandotte/). *cs.sou.edu*. Retrieved 2017-10-22.
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